A.R.G Digest

The first magazine dedicated to Alternate Reality Games

Observe the world beyond your own.

November/December 2023 issue

Unwrap and Explore - - Happy Holidays!

Need a Muse?

It's the gift that keeps on giving!

What's Inside?

DONT HUG ME IM SCARED

WELCOME HOME

NOT YOUR NORMAL KIDS SHOW

& Alex Bale

Creator of "Don't Feed The Muse" & much more!

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What's an ARG?

So, what is an ARG and how does it differ from other web series? ARG stands for alternate reality game, and it is played rather than simply being watched. That isn't to say that one doesn't watch an ARG, but they don't always have to. The experience comes from the interaction with the characters and world, as pieces of that world can be touched, influenced and altered. The story follows along with the interaction, in a fourth-wall breaking gesture. This can come in the form of character interaction, puzzles (hidden or in plain sight) or other games that affect the story they are set in.

Unfiction is similar in nature, but follows a clear-cut narrative. One can enter this world, but their influence is very limited, in relation to the main plot. One may even have characters within this world, but they must be tied in with the predetermined storyline.

Both of these game-like story genres are an unique form of art that allow those experiencing the stories to become immersed in their worlds. They become a part of them, and make real connections to the characters and places. It is an intense art experience, unlike so many others. Most importantly, at their core, they are deep, heartfelt stories used to express what we have so much trouble expressing in our normal lives. Stories were born along with our thoughts at the dawn of man, following each and every step we took. They were our first love, and our first obsession. No matter one's age, class or ethnicity... It is the one great, unifying factor: Storytelling. No matter how broken our hearts may be, no matter how much we may have to endure in life, stories will always be there for us in a way that nothing else can be. They will dance with our hearts, and intertwine with our spirits, healing us when nothing else could ever hope to. Writings, plays, sculptures, paintings, videos, films—or whichever form they may take—these stories are more than a passion. They are humanity in the purest form. This is why I dedicate every available moment to these stories. My obsession extends beyond myself, beyond my cares, needs or reasoning. They are true freedom, they are unity, they are expression and they are the soul. The stories I share and tell are more of myself than this mortal shell could ever hope to be.

Twelve years ago, Don't Hug Me I'm Scared premiered on YouTube with its first, self-titled episode. Now at over seventy six million views, Becky Sloan and Joseph Pelling's dementedly acerbic creation is a bonafide and legendary internet titan, spawning five follow-up episodes on YouTube. So when a continuation of the series was announced to debut in the fall of 2022 on BBC Channel 4's streaming service, All 4, the hype was palpable. Now, a year removed from that debut, a sober reflection on the differences between the original online run and what is considered "Season 2" on All 4 shows what changed and what remained the same, or possibly even improved.

The episode length is the most obvious difference, with the longest of "Season 1" coming in at only eight minutes, and the debut episode just under three and a half. "Season 2" more than doubles this with a typical comedy runtime of twenty three minutes and change per episode. That, along with what can be safely assumed to be a much bigger budget, allows for more complex plots, more characters, and more time outside of the main characters Yellow Guy, Red Guy and Duck's home. The first episode, "Jobs," begins much like one from the YouTube era. A daily mundanity is interrupted by a "teacher" character, in this case a briefcase, that soon launches into song to impart a lesson of a simple concept onto the main characters. In the case of the briefcase, that song is all about jobs. This would usually, in the case of the YouTube era, end up degenerating into some sort of gore or other horrific outcome and the conclusion of the song would soon be followed by the end of the episode. But in this case, the flurry of potential careers leaves our main characters stranded in some sort of factory, with briefcase abandoning them by disappearing into an utility closet. They find themselves in a new sort of existential horror: employment.

This new horror requires a new setting, and the sets (as always in this series) are beautiful. The production value all around is sky high. The factory floor seems a slightly more pleasant shade of "Go Away Green" that is used at Disney parks to disguise renovation work.

"The conveyor belt that feeds "bits and parts"

The upper management office that Red Guy finds himself occupying, dimly lit behind the blinds and with a fax machine that seems somewhere between flirting with him and obsequiousness. The conveyor belt that feeds "bits and parts" that define both the product and the tool-like bodies of the other employees. Everything has a sense of being colorful somehow, even while depicting a mostly gray industrial workspace. And while the YouTube era was not exactly a stranger to expanded sets and characters, the scale seems grander, no doubt also aided by the longer runtime and more complex plots. This brings us to the writing.

I am happy to report it is just as sharp as ever, if not more so. Red Guy finds his calling as upper management, where his meals (such as salmon with diamonds on top) put to shame the vending machine lasagna the plebeians relish in their scant thirty minute respite from work. When he questions whether diamonds are actually edible, the suck-up fax machine throws the meal on the floor. When Red Guy goes to clean it up, he is admonished to let the bin (anthropomorphic of course) clean it up, since menial tasks are below his status as management. "He's pathetic" says the fax machine. And the bin agrees! Red Guy spends his time answering phone calls and other seemingly easy and pointless tasks. He even gets to brush off the complaints of Duck and eventually fire him. Duck then goes to see the "CareHound." What exactly the CareHound is supposed to be never gets fully explained. A counselor? A mediator? What it actually turns out to be is a terrifying wolf's maw into which Duck is directed to speak his complaints. He ends up covered in drool, but his attitude seems much improved and he is eager to be rehired and get back to work.

Yellow Guy, meanwhile, seems a natural at taking the "bits" on the conveyor belt and turning them into useful "parts."

Whereas Duck's attempts lead to the forming of unholy, somehow sapient mutant parts that get shredded alive by machinery for being poor quality. This leads to his not being able to fit in (along with his general critique of the rest of the nonsensical factory, including a worker named Duncan who is "constructing the website" by physically drawing on the computer monitor.) Yellow Guy, the simplest of the three main characters, finds his niche being a mostly mindless worker drone, while Duck is perplexed and frustrated by this role, thus eventually leading to his firing at the hands of Red Guy.

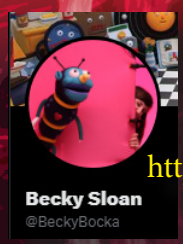
The episode ends in a satisfyingly gory conclusion as the Chekhov's Gun of the repeatedly mentioned industrial accident-prone factory claims Yellow Guy's hands, but not before the ravages of age and decades of work at the factory had already withered him, and caused Upper Management Red Guy to grow fat and gray as well. All that in one episode. The world building has leveled up. And much like the end of the run from the YouTube era, as this new season reaches its end, there are hints of something much more sinister and complex going on beyond what our main characters are experiencing in their simple lives.

> "He ends up covered in drool"

The song writing is also as great as ever. Along with "Jobs," the titular episode themes of "Death," "Family," "Friendship," "Transport" and "Electricity" are all delightfully, sardonically skewered. I enjoyed the "Transport" episode and song especially, as an old man train is barely able to move or manage lyrical coherence before collapsing, dead, his Tom Waits-esque rasp mercifully silenced along with his suffering. "Family" is another stand out episode and song, with a pair of unnerving twins with beady eyes lecturing the main characters as to why they do not qualify as a proper family, and thus are not eligible for family discounts or family-sized bags of snacks.

All this adds up to a package that delivers on all fronts. Catchy, clever, disturbing, hilarious, colorful and as brilliant as ever, Don't Hug Me I'm Scared carries its YouTube era torch into the streaming arena with grace and aplomb. With any luck, Sloan and Pelling will continue to ignore the advice of the very first short and be creative again, giving fans more of what they crave.

Written by
Lili Ardat



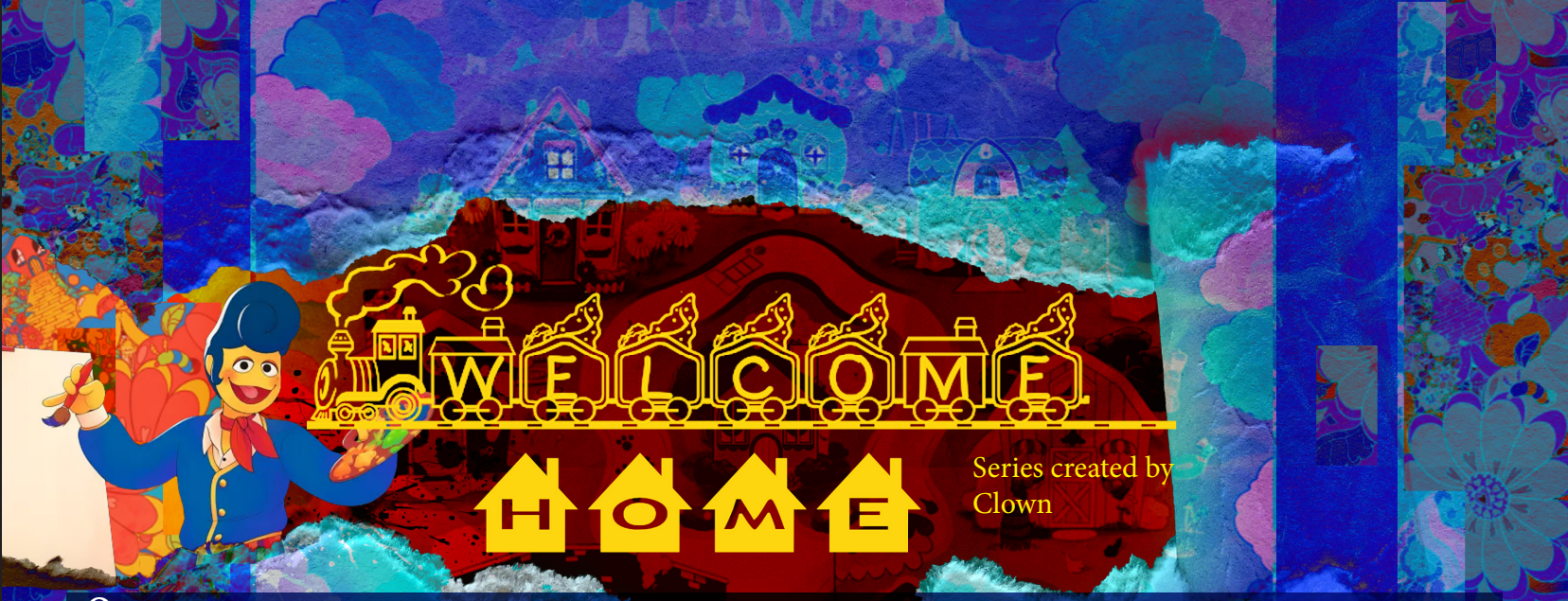
https://twitter.com/BeckyBocka

https://twitter.com/japelling
https://www.beckyandjoes.com
https://www.youtube.com/@donthugmeimscared

Images from Don't hug me I'm scared

Images from BBC

Mullhoven



Over the past year, Welcome Home seemed to come out of nowhere and dominated the imaginations and attention of the Unfiction scene. Painstakingly, lovingly crafted artwork and characters making for a highly believable 70s era alternate universe Sesame Street or the like. Maybe something akin to the early Nickelodeon series Today's Special, sans the human counterparts. The adverts, the merchandise, concept art, a Halloween audio drama on an old 45 record presented with the cover of an accompanying picture book. Wally Darling, Eddie Dear, Poppy Partridge, Howdy Pillar, Sally Starlet. All as sweet as sugar and vibrant as a fresh pack of Crayolas. Perfectly set up for a slow descent into something terribly twisted and deliciously evil, a delight for fans of horror and what is portrayed as lost media.

So how does the darkness creep into this otherwise Utopian neighborhood of friendly faces and congenial residents? What one discovers first depends on the order one decides to explore the different sections of the website.

In my case, the first hints appeared while checking out the "About Us" section. The staff in charge of restoration is anonymous "for their safety." The few artifacts from the show they do receive come in brightly colored envelopes from sources that are not identified. They are often half destroyed and fully defaced, covered in ink and paint, mashed into the envelopes with little care, and perhaps haste and desperation. In the website text itself, letters appear slightly out of place here and there. Certain turns of phrase like "awaken the memory" and distorted text that reads "When I unwrapped the first letter, I felt it. I heard it. Open. Open. Open. I want it out. I'm going to get it out. "When described like this, it might seem heavy-handed. And indeed, there is no mistaking that something being askew here is putting it lightly. But peppered in with the overwhelmingly joyful and bright children's media on the surface of the website, it is just the right amount of spice to counterbalance the sugar. It's a familiar trope in the world of Unfiction, lost media loaded with childhood nostalgia turns out to be cursed, leading to horror.

But somehow Welcome Home is able to make it feel fresh and unique.

Centrally positioned in the horror (and the neighborhood itself) sits Wally Darling, picturesque upon a rock with bright chalk drawings, under an orange autumnal tree in a delightfully ironic devil's costume (as of the writing of this article, the website is currently sporting it's most recent Halloween update. A new update is scheduled for the winter holidays.) Behind him, peeking out from behind a bed of flowers, stands Home, Wally's house, and seemingly a character in its own right. Wally speaks slowly and serenely. I am surprised to have not seen much mention that his cadence and tone is reminiscent of Mister Rogers. A bit slower and a bit more subdued, but when he calls you "neighbor" there is no mistaking the similarity.

"loaded with childhood nostalgia"

But the more we hear Wally speak, via hidden audio recordings, or a prominently displayed section of a TV interview, both what he says and how he says it leaves no doubt Wally is in some sort of turmoil. Hypnotized, possessed, what have you: Wally is in the thrall of evil.

He speaks of eyes and spirals. If you click on the semi-obscured puddle of black sludge just under the doorstep of Home, you are taken to Wally on his knees, peering out the window of Home, which makes its eye. The divider of the panes form a golden cross over the black pupil. Are the upper panes ever so slightly longer than the lower ones, making the cross technically inverted? Or is that just your imagination? What is certainly not imaginary is the red streaks and drips that make up the rest of the image, unmistakably invoking blood. And at the bottom is a red spiral with a tail end descending down.

"WALLY IS IN THE THRALL OF EVIL."

Eyes seem to dominate Wally's hauntings. If one zooms the web page out completely, beyond the colorful borders on the margins lie two eyes.

Hidden audio files presented as records with a spinning icon resembling eyes, and the audio itself of Wally speaking often addresses eyes in particular. "That's what an eye looks like. My eyes are black. What color are yours?" and "I have more eyes than I did before. You know how to draw eyes. You draw mine many times. I know it is thanks to you, neighbor, that I can see. But it is still... I can't... See." In that last example and at other times, Wally seems to address you, the website visitor or visitors, personally. "What are you waiting for? To hear me again? Ha ha ha! I think... That means you can hear me." The guestbook, now closed, has drawings made over some of the entries. Open these images in a new tab and the filenames work as responses to the guest's messages. Click on the "You" on The Neighborhood section and you'll see a message "Wally is your best friend." Click further for another audio recording of Wally: "Can you see me? That's okay if you can't. Don't worry, I know you're there. You know I'm here too. I will talk to you."

Also hidden in clickable areas are video clips with the various characters interacting and going about their day. The camera doesn't move and doesn't show the characters. It becomes increasingly obvious that this is a POV shot of someone, and that someone seems to be Wally, as the video abruptly stops with a glitch when Wally is mentioned by name. In other words, the entire time the others are interacting and speaking, Wally is wordlessly staring straight ahead into space. Something is definitely not right with Wally.

Providing direct narrative evidence that something is cursed about this show is the record of the exhibition of Welcome Home media, facilitated by someone called the Question Answerer. I will leave that for the reader to discover on their own. Suffice to say, our world and the world that contains whatever darkness is confined within Welcome Home are not as separated as one might think. In the words of Wally, "I will find a way soon. I will help you understand, neighbor."

Welcome Home is just as brilliant as they say, and it seems to have plenty more in store before the story comes to an end. If by some chance you have hesitated to jump in with the rest, hesitate no more. As Wally would say "It's the most."

Written by
Lili Ardat

Socials

https://www.instagram.com/partycoffin/
https://www.clownillustration.com/
https://www.clownillustration.com/welcomehomeyou

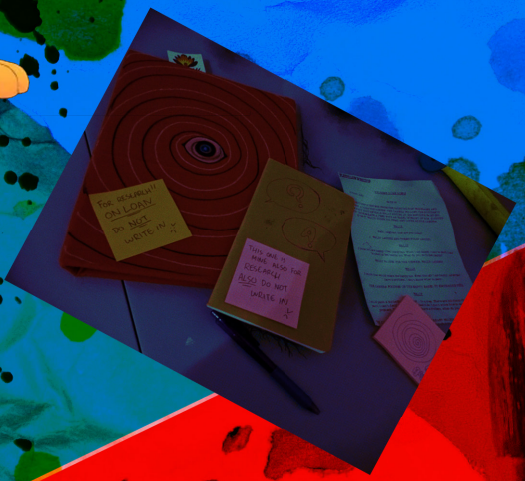
Images from WELCOME HOME

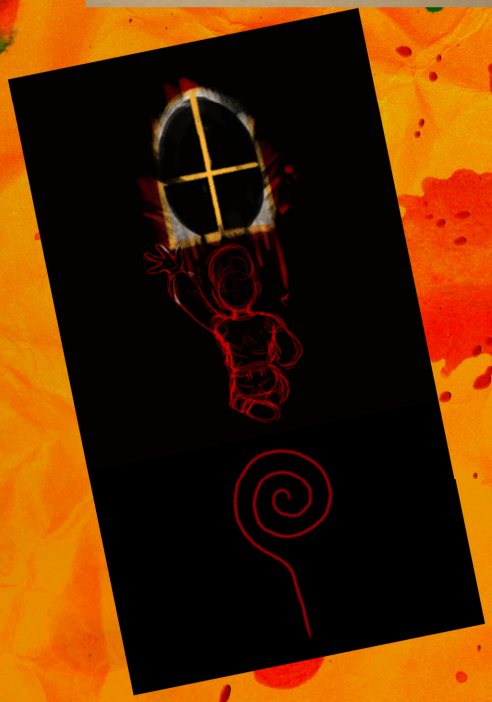
Created/Artwork by Clown

These puppets are here to stay!
See them take on a life of their own in.....
Welcome Home!
An unfamiliar neighbor is just a friend you haven't met yet and the world of Welcome Home has plenty of new faces to get acquainted with! Colorful characters like Wally, Julie, Barnaby, and are waiting to meet you! Invite them into your happy home with toys that will last a life time!

Enjoy!
CEREAL
SALT

EDDIE
CAN LIFT A
HOUSE!





There is no gift like the gift of friendship. In this digital age, it has become increasingly difficult to find quality companionship in the physical world. While you may have dozens of friends online, you may find yourself completely isolated on the other end of the screen. Well, what if I told you that you could find a happy in-between? What if I told you that you could physically meet your online friend in the realm in between reality and virtual reality?

"Not Your Normal Kids Show" opens in the stereotypical kids' show format. An overly happy and warmly dressed host greets us from a studio with a brightly colored background as a happy tune plays overhead. The host begins the show's introduction but is interrupted by a phone call. An abnormally tall man (referred to as Tall Man) holds the old fashioned phone on a plate. The host answers and a voice on the other end whispers back, "You didn't close the curtains completely. Why don't you open the door?" and we see the host's eyes turn white as the voice repeatedly demands that she open said door. She slams the phone down and tells us that it was merely the wrong number, giving us a warning to not open the door for strangers, with her eyes now completely glossed over. Clearly, this is not your normal kids' show.

The warning to not open the door for strangers plays out in the next episode as we are given an example as to why we shouldn't. Tall Man knocks on a woman's door and she answers. She doesn't see anyone outside, but the mere fact that she opened the door allows the Tall Man to phase into her home and abduct her.

In the next episode, the host is doing her laundry. When she turns the light on in the laundry room, the bulb produces a dim crimson light instead of the typical brighter hue. A featureless figure is revealed to be within this room. It whispers in a voice similar to the person on the phone from before, begging for the host to turn the lights off again, so that the host can't see her.

We cut away, catching our first glimpse of a creature that will be haunting this series in the coming episodes. Its distorted and emaciated form stands silently, displaying the time in its mouth. Ever watching and ever reminding the host to follow good behaviors, similar to what a mother would do. This is also when we hear our first mention of the host's 'mother' and are told that we shouldn't make her angry. We say goodnight to the sun, which is now sporting a demonic face, and are given a warning reminiscent of the wives' tales told to children to keep them in line, "Don't have your legs outside of your blanket past 11." and though we aren't given an answer as to what would happen if we did, we can easily imagine what might occur in a world of monsters and distorted demonic creatures.

"WE SAY GOODNIGHT TO THE SUN, WHICH IS NOW SPORTING A DEMONIC FACE"

The next time we see the host, she is planting what appears to be body parts in a pot of dirt. An aged and decaying face, with the same glazed eyes that we saw in the first episode, emerges from the back of the host's head. Is this the 'mother' that was mentioned? Did the two become one entity somehow or is this more symbolic and referring to how her mother planted these ideas in her head? After the host notices us, she quickly begins the show. She mentions that she doesn't want to be forgotten, as the world distorts to reveal that the host is actually standing in a void. This world seems to represent isolation or dissociation from the world that was forced upon her. Was she neglected by her mother, perhaps? Could it be that her mother was so busy stuffing her head with her own ideas that she never stopped to ask if the host wanted that life for herself? Another odd thing to point out here is that the distortion reveals source code before transitioning into the void. This makes me think that the whole world could be a simulation of sorts, or at least part of some sort of program. Heck, the host might even be an A.I. trapped within a virtual world, for all we know.

About half way through this series, we are informed that the host's name is "Dottie" and that she is looking for friends to come and join her in this world. To demonstrate how that is done, we are shown that Dottie has the ability to drag people in, who watch her show and interact with her, through electronic device screens, if the screens are big enough. If they are not, she sends the Tall Man to collect them. Again, who doesn't want to meet their online friends in real life?

This show is ongoing and many of the mysteries remain unsolved, but we are given clues in the following episodes that lead me to believe that my conclusion from before might be right. Dottie seems to have been neglected in some fashion, being obsessed with people giving her all of the attention and only fearing being forgotten, showing no fear when being confronted by literal demons. Speaking of demons, when Dottie leaves us with a 'friend' while she takes care of some chores, her friend tells us, "I'm trapped, forever to scale a never ending labyrinth of death and rebirth, all to feed a narcissistic demon's dream." While this could be referring to Dottie's mother and her dream for Dottie, it could also be referring to something that Dottie mentioned in the Q&A video. When asked how she got the show started, Dottie replies that: "I did it with help from someone who believed in me."

Could it be that she made a faustian deal with some sort of demon, in exchange for this world? We do see her communing with some sort of shadowy figure the next time we catch her before a show. This figure reminds me a lot of the demon who made a deal with Alessa in the horror franchise "Silent Hill" in exchange for power. Actually, the distorted world reminds me a lot of the distorted world in which the people of Silent Hill were trapped.

So, what do you make of Dottie and her show? More importantly, will you be her friend? You can find this series on the TikTok account Beeveekee.

Written by
G.P Reeds

"This world seems to represent isolation or dissociation from the world that was forced upon her."

https://www.tiktok.com/@beeveekee
https://www.instagram.com/beeveekeeofficial/?hl=en
https://www.youtube.com/@beeveekeeofficial/featured

Images from
series Youtube/
Tik tok channel

Azu Crystal ♡

spectral radian: strife of altered souls

*still a work in progress

My name's Hailey and my life is anything but normal. I've been here in Sombre Oak for...well, I'm not totally sure how long it's been. When I first moved here, things were ok. The town and people were nice enough. The thing is, though, I had no idea that I never should've come here.

Strange things have been happening (like hearing noises in my home, having strange dreams, not remembering different things and seeing an ad for a Winery that feels like it's talking to me.) and I'm not really sure what to do. (I'm especially not sure what to do about Blake.)

Not too long after I got here, I started a Blog about what's been going on (it's now up to 19 blog posts). You can find it at

https://danjewel34.wixsite.com/my-odd-experiences

Interview with Alex Bale

Written by G.P Reeds

Stories are such peculiar things. Even the most surreal fiction can oftentimes link directly with real world experiences, on a scale that nonfiction simply can not. It reaches those emotions and concepts that we find the hardest to express. Perhaps, through these fictitious characters and worlds, we feel safe enough to approach them. The concept of "finding one's muse" and becoming so entwined in it that one is no longer able to pursue their ambitions is one I have faced multiple times, but have struggled to express. This concept is so effortlessly expounded upon in Alex Bale's series "Don't' Feed The Muse" and that is what inspired me to pick this artist's brain.

So, what inspired you to start creating stories, and when did you discover that you wanted to be a filmmaker?

I always really liked YouTubers. I was a big YouTube fan growing up, and I thought the idea of being one was the coolest job in the world! But it really wasn't until early middle school, when I started doing little school projects that involved videos, that I got that first little kick that really opened my eyes to filmmaking and the possibilities of storytelling through the medium. I had a blast making them and showing them off to my class, even though they were really shitty back then. It was a sort of bug that got into my system and never left.

Did being a YouTuber live up to the title of "the coolest job in the world?"

I think so! I am incredibly fortunate to be in this position where I can just make things that I really love making. It's also allowed me to sort of 'on the side' work on bigger projects that maybe aren't as lucrative, but I can still focus on them because the other YouTube stuff does well. So, I would say it's the job I love and that's super cool.

How was the journey there? I find that, oftentimes, it's a battle that gets you to where you want to be.

Again, I think I was pretty fortunate. The environment I was in when I first started creating videos just really worked out for me. Most of my middle school and high school life consisted of making little film projects. There wasn't a lot of pressure for them to be super good and I didn't have a big audience watching them. So, it was very low stakes and very low pressure and that allowed me to get over the hurdle of 'the first things you make are going to suck' because it was just a good environment for that journey. It also just sort of worked out where my YouTube took off and became financially viable at the right moment. I was leaving college and I was like, "Okay, this can just be my job." I've made SpongeBob theories and things for a while. They were a lot of fun.

Everyone has their own story of discovering the ARG genre, when and how did you discover it?

Early ARG coverage channels like 'Night Mind' and 'Reignbot' introduced me to them, and I was really blown away by the genre. They weren't like anything I had ever seen before. It just felt so much more real and immersive and powerful than any other sort of storytelling. So, I knew early on that if I wanted to make something then that was what I wanted to make in. The feeling I had from watching them was the feeling I wanted to give people. With a story like "Don't Feed The Muse" in particular, I felt the story could best be told through ARG, since it explores these ideas of online content creation. I could actually create the thing it was about.

Was “Don’t Feed The Muse” a story that grew as the theory content progressed or was the story outline written beforehand?

I would say that it was pretty planned from the start. I knew where it would start and end, and the themes I wanted to explore were there. Even the final scene and shots were something I came up with from the very beginning. There were things that came up naturally as we went, but it all kind of felt like natural solutions from the themes I wanted to explore. Nothing felt super improvised. Everything stemmed from the initial ideas I came up with.

I’m curious, was there anything you enjoyed more in your last ARG project “Pizza Time Pizza” when comparing the two?

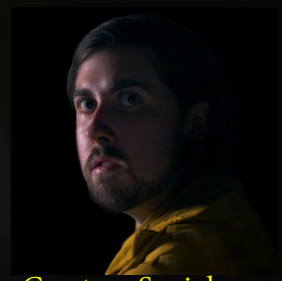
I enjoyed “Don’t Feed The Muse” a lot more than “Pizza Time Pizza” in pretty much all aspects. It was a much more fulfilling experience. Honestly, the reason “Don’t Feed The Muse” was so planned out from the start was because “Pizza Time Pizza” didn’t have much of a structured plan. I don’t think that “Pizza Time Pizza” had much of a subtext or a message or a theme. So, for me, it lost some steam as it went along. That’s why when I went into “Don’t Feed The Muse” I knew from the start that I needed to come up with central ideas that I wanted to explore and stick with them until the end.

When you think back on your art, what message would you like for all of it to represent?

I don’t think I can really answer that question, because I believe that art can be interpreted in so many different ways—even beyond the creators intent for it. There’s something kind of beautiful about that. You know? I especially learned that from making SpongeBob theories. I found many ways to interpret things that probably weren’t intended by the creators. I don’t really want to say there is a single message because I feel like that might limit people. Something else that I would like to say here is that I think a lot of people take away from the series that I’m a struggling artist that hates making SpongeBob theories and is being forced. I love making those theories. They would not have been any good if I didn’t love making them. I will continue to make theories about other things in the future.

Any advice for aspiring creators?

Don't put too much pressure on yourself to get views, get an audience or even be completely original. Again, I started out making shitty copies of things that I loved. They didn't get many views, and they weren't that great, but they were such a valuable learning experience. Something inspired you to create. Start there and grow from those experiences.



Creators Socials

https://www.youtube.com/@AlexBaleFilms
https://twitter.com/AlexBaleReal
https://www.instagram.com/alex__bale/

GREETINGS FROM...

Winter Hollow

AUTHENTIC SMALL-TOWN WYOMING

POSTCARD

Discover the truth.

-ELF

P.S Tell Penumbra that I figured out how his stupid sigil works.

Address:

haunted-hollows.blogspot.com

winterhollowpublicradio.tumblr.com

[redacted]
[redacted]
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OUR APOLOGIES!
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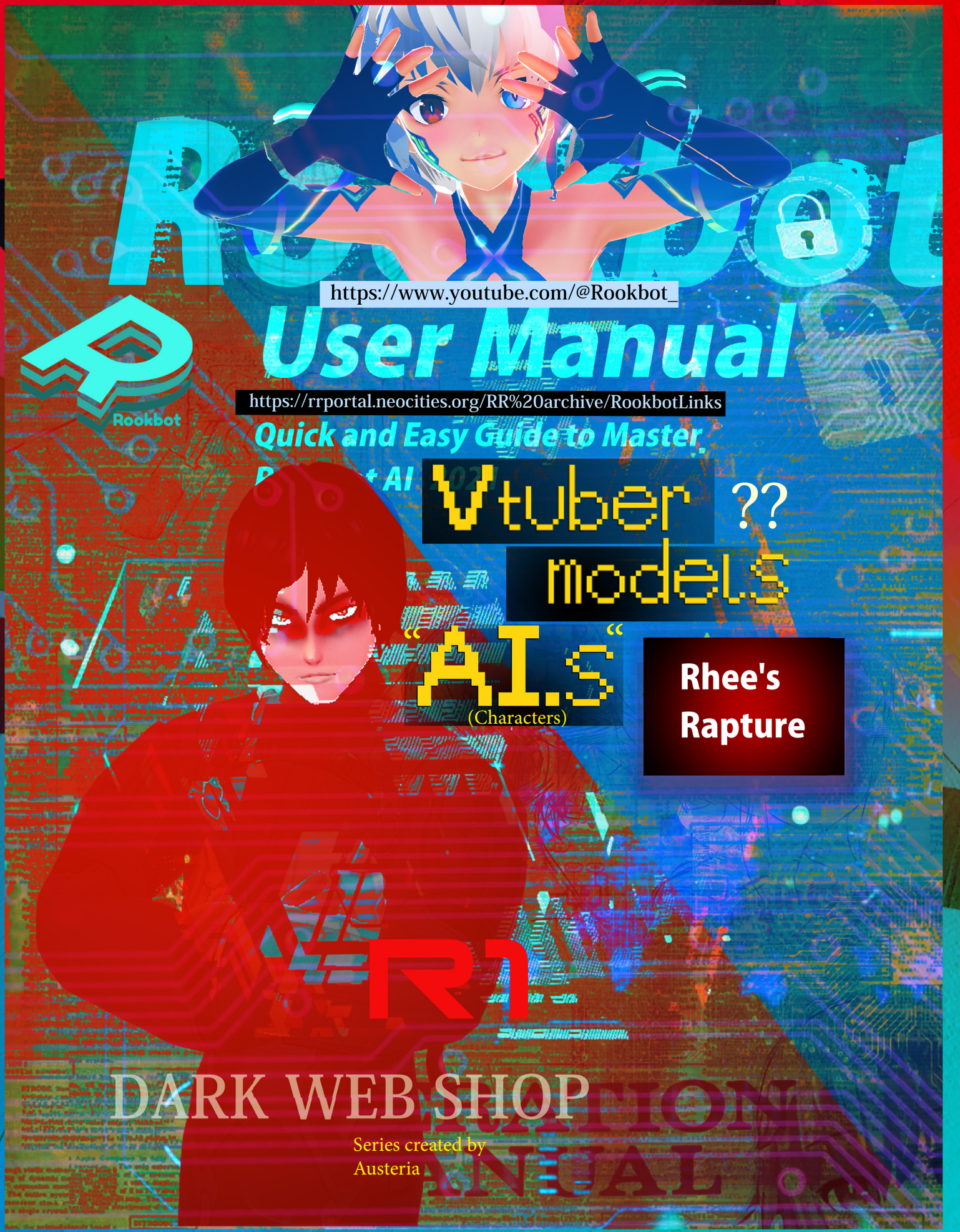

https://www.youtube.com/@Rookbot_
User Manual
https://rrportal.neocities.org/RR%20archive/RookbotLinks
Quick and Easy Guide to Master
Vtuber
models
??
"A.I.s"
(Characters)
Rhee's
Rapture
R1
DARK WEB SHOP
Series created by
Austeria

The Future
Youtube
ROBOT MONSTER
IN TRU-STEREO 3DIMENSION
A.I
FOR JUSTICE
Magical Robo girl
Action Packed
資料
ALTERNATE 3D
REALITY
Rhee's
Rapture
ADVENTURES INTO THE FUTURE
抱っこ

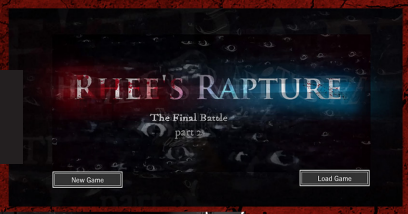
Prequel
2024
original series
Artwork
by Austeria

We're closed, I thought I told you to get lost.
I figure I would share some kindness with you. Ex-Network scum.

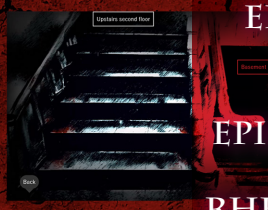
Alternate Reality Game
RHEE'S RAPTURE
ARG Horror
Epilogue
Pieces
Of
Raptura
indie horror

Games created by Austeria

Rhee's Rapture
Visual novel/search click games



1.
CYBER BATTLE
2.
RHEE'S PORTAL TO HIS HOUSE
3.
EPILOGUE DEMONIC DRESS UP GAME
4.
EPILOGUE CACTH GRIMBUS GAME
5.
RHEE'S RAPTURE HALLOWEEN LORE EVENT



Check out the Website for archival of the series, epilogue gameplay and browser games.

https://rrportal.neocities.org/

This Game I Found

"Okay, so does everyone remember the 'Meta Crystal' stage from Super Smash Bros? My cartridge had a lot of dirt in it, so I cleaned it out with some rubbing alcohol. I think what happened is not all of the alcohol dried out. And when I plugged the cartridge back in and turned on the N64, everything was the same except all the memory was wiped. In the versus mode, Luigi, Captain Falcon, Jigglypuff and Ness were all locked again. But Mushroom Kingdom was unlocked as a stage, and so was the tutorial 'How to Play' stage, and even that one with the crystal Mario boss in the one-player mode!
I saw it myself. I told my uncle about it (he works at Nintendo) and he told me one or two of the software engineers put those extra stages in there. I must have activated it with a glitch."

This is the kind of fiction that kids my age heard on playgrounds or at friends' houses, huddled around a whirring console and a staticky television. Often, they are reinterpretations or misunderstandings of real behind-the-scenes information, especially as a generation raised with the internet. Just as often, they are a kid's attempt at gathering attention for a little bit—a bragging point among gullible friends.
So why do urban legends take the form of "this game I found?"
There is no shortage of supposed hidden levels, secret glitches, and accidental patterns found in video games. Players really can impact their experiences through manipulations of the game or the console's hardware, and often the console can detect those manipulations. Movies for kids sometimes include out-of-context jokes that are only funny to adults, like the infamous "Pink Elephants on Parade" sequence from Disney's "Dumbo" (1941) or basically any of Robin Williams' lines from "Aladdin."

When you're a kid, all kinds of these fantastical, psychoanalytical things might happen. The idea in the US that children are not just small adults but are their own unique classification, doted over (and not sent to work as soon as possible) comes from labor reforms in the 1930s. Innocence is not just something you have. It's something adults put onto you. Urban legends like these let you see a glimpse beyond the story's subject matter and into its craft, an alternate version of the same reality.
Your parents talk about concepts that you can't understand. You experience many primal fears like darkness at night and isolation in large places. The neat tidiness, the friendly faces, the bright color palette of a cartoon are not of the reality you live in. Your imaginary friends stay with you in shadowy closets and dark hallways. When the nightmares show up in the cartoon and when you dream, it is proof that nowhere is safe. The monsters are in the real world with you—a child's worst fear and an ARG player's fascination.

We're surrounded by creepypasta. We get to constantly reinvent stories, like I have mentioned before regarding Slenderman webseries. I don't have an actual family member that works at Nintendo, but this is a commonly repeated detail to lend immersion and credibility to the fiction.

Stories that follow a dramatic trajectory of "'your favorite video game, but it's evil' (Ben Drowned), or 'your favorite TV show, but it's evil' (Candle Cove or the Rugrats theory) or 'for legal reasons, not Chuck E. Cheese, but it's evil' (Five Nights at Freddy's) are not new. Some of these are done really well, like the Mandela Catalogue's religious horror themes.

Exposure to these types of media can lead to an overwhelming sense of dread that we as adults know all too well: "This is something I should not know, yet here it is, in front of me."

Even worse, kids who experience this type of horror often can't even understand what they're looking at, much less communicate those big feelings to an adult who can help. They are scared of having thoughts that are wrong - time passing without their noticing - loving the wrong way - finding information they aren't supposed to know - eating the wrong foods - their own nightmares. This inspires the stories they tell, in turn.

Kids, just like adults, use horror to make sense of what they experience. Monsters are easier to deal with, in comparison.

"Exposure to these types of media can lead to an overwhelming sense of dread"

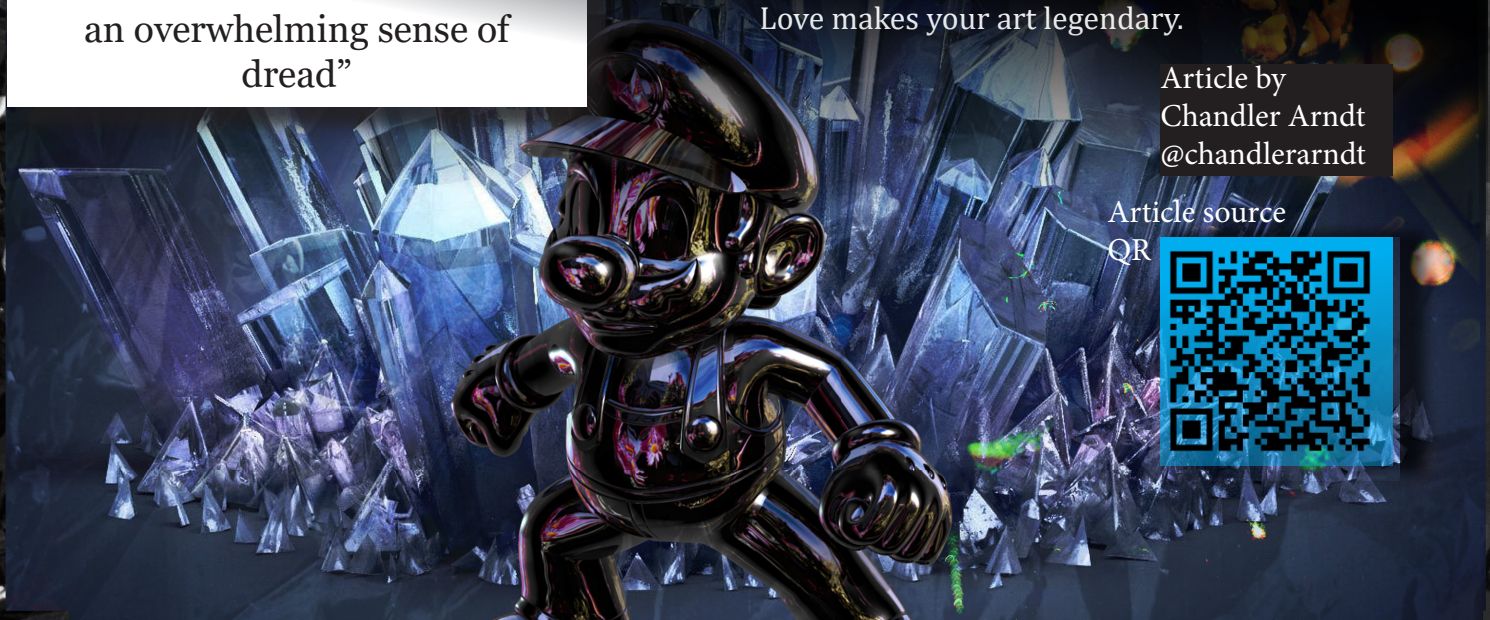
One of the best examples of this urban legend style is the "Don't Hug Me, I'm Scared" webseries (and later TV show). "Don't Hug Me, I'm Scared" showed up as a short film on YouTube first. Much like the "Candle Cove" creepypasta, it is not a parody of an existing part of our collective unconscious. It is not an urban legend, heard from a friend who heard it from a friend. It isn't a tape from an abandoned student film project. This is a puppet show made by puppeteers.

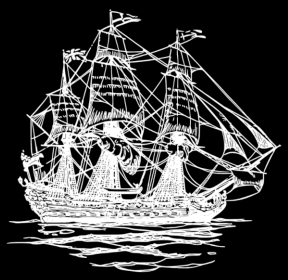
Scary instead of cute isn't enough for a deconstruction, and "Don't Hug Me, I'm Scared" knows it. Unfiction analyst Nick Nocturne from the 'Night Mind' YouTube channel notes that the teacher figures in the show don't just fail to teach coherent lessons to the main characters. they are more concerned about spreading terror and violence than teaching. This show shocked me and then fascinated me, made me dread soft, plushy felt. And there are many other projects with just as much love behind their creation.

If your goal is immersion, you can still tell new, original stories. That guiding principle of 'this game I found' happens to work for all kinds of art. In this way, you should see hushed voices on a playground, frantic forum searches, phone screens shoved into the faces of friends for what they are: glowing endorsements of your craft. Your audience can tell how much you care about them. Theories or tall tales about extra content in a game are a sign that the audience wants to love their favorite art even more. They want to find more - explore deeper - know everything there is about your art. Love makes your art legendary.

Article by
Chandler Arndt
@chandlerarndt

Article source QR





the code

"What is going to determine the answer to the question is not the question as such in the form in which it was posed, it is also the idea that the interrogated subject forms about the most appropriate tactic to adopt in function of the concept he has formed about the expectations of the interrogator." And further: "The artifact is something else entirely than a controlled transformation of the object for the ends of knowledge: it is a rude interference with reality, at the end of which it is impossible to say what in reality can be objectively known and what is the result of technical intervention (medium). The I.Q. is an artifact."

wyfio

Hootie draws a teleportion circle as the spider creeps up.
Aura Jumps in the air and gobbles it up.
CHOMP
CHOMP
CHOMP
Aura says "I'm sorry, Curtis, but my brother isn't getting him. Goodbye, old friend." He then hugs Hootie and says "I know I'm not the best uncle, and I could never replace your parents, but I promised that I would never let anyone hurt you. Darren is bad news. I love you, you little jerk... Don't go..."
You're wrong...
You are the best uncle and I love you too...
Hootie finishes the circle and disappears. Aura falls to his knees and cries.
END

Alex Bale
Creator of
"Don't Feed The Muse"
"Happy Meat Farm"
+ more
ARG creator and Filmaker
Article by
G.P Reeds

It's that time of year again! The brisk Autumn air has come and gone, leaving an icy chill to fill its space. Although the Winter season brings with it that seasonal depression we all know so well, there is also an air of cheer that culminates from the family gatherings, warm fires and holiday parties. With Christmas just around the corner, and pressure at every turn to find that 'perfect gift' for your loved ones, it is truly a mixed bag of emotions. Let's focus on Thanksgiving for the moment and what is closely associated with that particular holiday—food.

For those of you lucky enough (or unlucky enough) to have stumbled across the YouTube channel "this place is not happy" two years ago, you likely found yourself completely enthralled by the mystery behind the enigmatic company "Happy Meat Farms." What started as a 'cruelty free' organic meat company quickly devolved into a genetic testing facility with grotesque results: chickens with swollen bodies and multiple heads, cows covered in tumors and lesion-covered pigs with extra limbs just to name a few. These mission changes were made when the company faced bankruptcy, forcing them to accept a partnership with an unnamed investor. This investor seems to be the entity behind the tests, but at this point the motives are unclear.

Digging through the videos and website, we discover someone called 'Mother' who seems to be pulling the strings from a location designated as "HR." This also happens to be where the more mutated test subjects are sent, after being given multiple treatments of the experimental growth hormone. One of these entities (a seven month old bull) escapes the facility after experiencing extreme mutations. This little hiccup doesn't stop them however, and they continue to human trials. In the human trial segment, we see mutations similar to what the animals experienced, but one test subject in particular "H0027" is given a new designation of "host" and she too escapes the facility.

"What started as a 'cruelty free' organic meat company quickly devolved into a genetic testing facility with grotesque results"

This is where we leave off before the tone of the series changes completely. Alex Bale is a film producer and theory writer primarily found on a self-entitled YouTube channel. His works consist of various short horror films and documentary-style videos of the same vein. There was a hard shift in his work however, mysteriously beginning around the same time that 'this place is not happy' was released. He went from horror related content to almost entirely 'SpongeBob Squarepants' theory videos.

This unexpected shift was accompanied by a new slew of short films that were tucked into the end portions of some of the aforementioned theory videos. In the first one, Alex gathers an absurd amount of raw meat into a bag and carries it to a room that has an impossibly dark section. This darkness is thick and oppressive, filling the space in such a way that can only be described as supernatural. An unseen entity drags the bag of meat into the darkness, and soon after, a small glass bottle rolls out of darkness. Alex opens it and the video ends.

"An unseen entity drags the bag of meat into the darkness"

The second time we see Alex in these short film segments, he has once again approached the darkness and is bargaining with whatever lurks within. He explains that he needs a break from the SpongeBob videos and wants to work on exclusively short films again. His pleas are met with this response from a gravely and distorted voice, "When I found you, you were unnoticed and unloved. But now you have millions of views. You have sponsors. Why would you forsake them?" and Alex responds, "I don't want to make these videos forever. I don't want to be known as the 'SpongeBob guy." The entity laughs at him and mocks Alex for thinking that anyone would care about his works, aside from the SpongeBob theories.

Alex continues to feed the entity meat, in exchange for the theory video ideas, but he feels trapped in doing so. Eventually, it isn't enough to bring the creature raw meat. It requires living prey. The entity devours Alex's poor cat. This starts Alex on a journey to find a way to remove the creature from his house, but everywhere he turns, he can't seem to find an answer. Misery overtakes him, which clashes with the success Alex has found and the praises he receives from his fans and friends. Alex's friend Victoria seems to notice his discontentment, however, and she confronts him at his house to discuss his problem.

Alex is quick to ward her off, telling her that it isn't a good time to visit. She counters by saying that she sees how odd he is acting as of late, staying home in the dark all day and not doing anything but working on his theory videos. She forces her way in and Alex panics, thinking that surely the creature will devour her like it did his cat. Victoria catches Alex off guard when she tells him not to worry and that his 'muse' won't eat her. She informs him that she too has one. She tells Alex to keep feeding it, and it will leave him with enough content to last for years.

Alex reluctantly agrees to continue feeding the muse, with the stipulation of 'only using raw meat and not living meat,' but the muse does something unexpected when Alex attempts to bargain with it, jabbing his neck with its spindly black tentacle. This impregnates Alex with a new muse. Alex then visits his friend Wess, partially influenced by the larvae, where he vomits the new muse into his trash can, spreading the curse to Wess. Was it all that bad though? Wess did mention that he wished he could have a successful project and career like Alex.

Alex calls a meeting with Victoria to discuss what had just happened. She informs him that he 'did the right thing' and now his friend will be taken care of like they were. This makes me question if Victoria was the one who gave Alex his muse in the first place, having had one before him and knowing about the 'impregnation phase.' This isn't the only thing that makes me question her motives however. Remember that 'host' patient that was mentioned in the beginning?

What if that was Victoria and her muse had been the other subject that escaped? Or maybe that 'host' had given Victoria her muse and she had just furthered the cycle. I'm also curious about what this 'Mother' entity in HR wants with the test subjects. Could it have been her blood or hormones that brought about these parasitic transformations?

"Alex reluctantly agrees to continue feeding the muse"

I believe that mother could be an entity from another world that was seeking ways to assimilate life on earth and produce compatible children in which she could enslave them via these 'muses.' That is simply my theory, however, and I strongly encourage you to seek out the possible answers for yourself.
While this story is definitely filled with interesting lore and questions, the true core of the magic lies

in the real world lessons it teaches. Oftentimes, as creatives we find ourselves striving for that thing that sticks, that commercial life raft in which we can support ourselves creatively while working on the art that we truly want to produce. The problem arises when we find ourselves so entangled in that life raft that we can no longer find the time to work on our true passions. The very thing that kept us alive becoming an Eldritch monster that consumes us the more we feed into it, replacing us with a version of ourselves that has lost its true purpose.

"Oftentimes, as creatives we find ourselves striving for that thing that sticks"

I won't get into the conclusion of this series here, as I believe that it is best experienced in its intended cinematic format. The full series of events (Alex's parts) can be experienced through the SpongeBob theory videos on the channel "Alex Bale" and the

"Don't Feed The Muse" playlist. I do encourage you to play through the preliminary ARG "Happy Meat Farms" as well. This series is expertly crafted and beautifully told. I ensure that you won't regret experiencing it from start to finish.
With all of that said, Happy Holidays! Oh—and one more thing. I left you a present in your closet to celebrate the season! You aren't a vegetarian are you? You'll be needing a ton of meat.

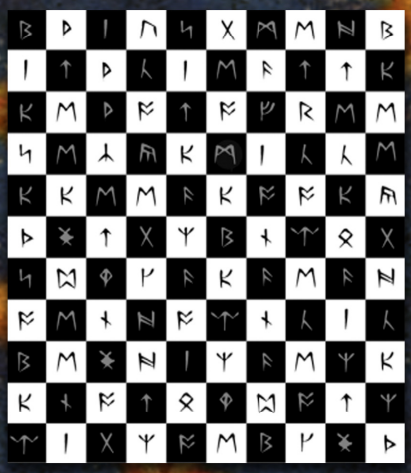
Images from

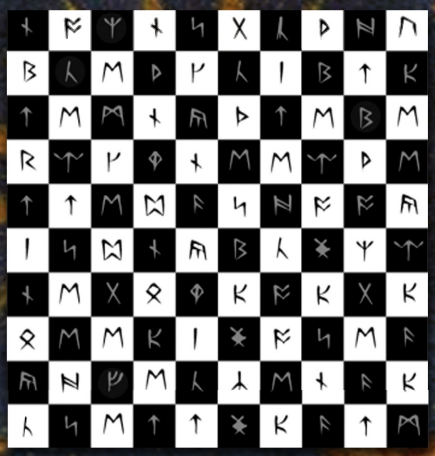
Alex Bale

Hello, loyal Solcorp customer

As we move into the final phases of this Solcorp experience, we would like to remind you that skipping any of these provided tests is strictly prohibited.
To ensure that this does not occur, a simplified version of this test (puzzle) has been provided on this page and the key will accompany it on the following page. This is your one and only warning love,

-Upper management (Neon Accord)





Layout by
G.P Reeds

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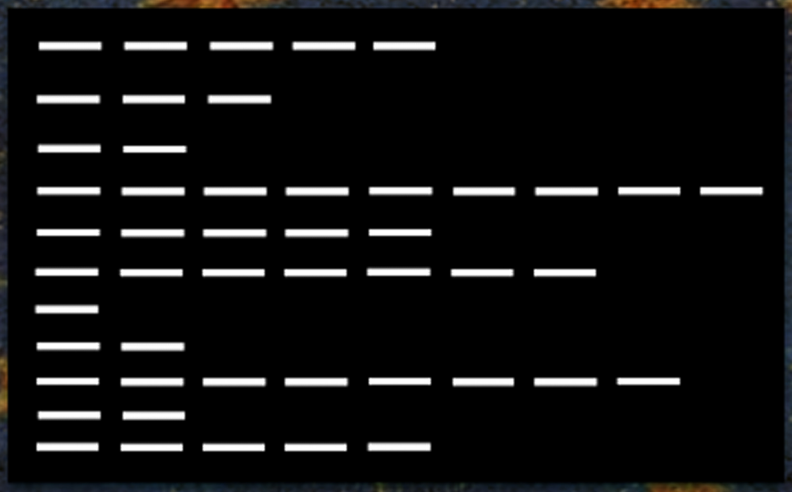

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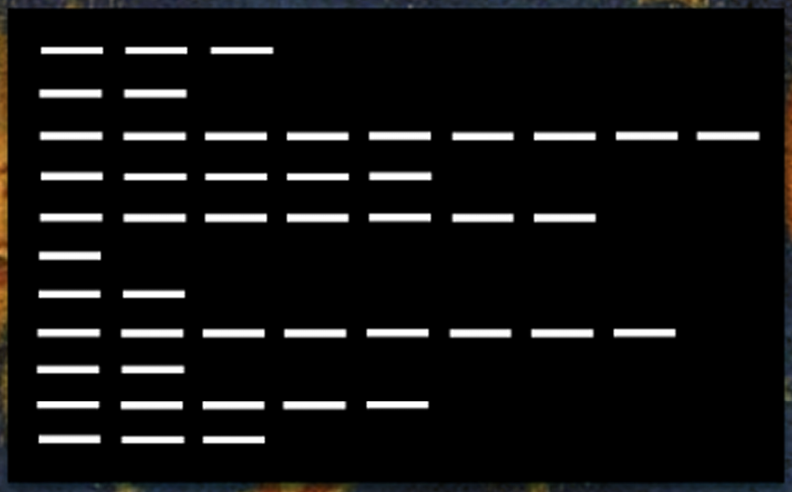

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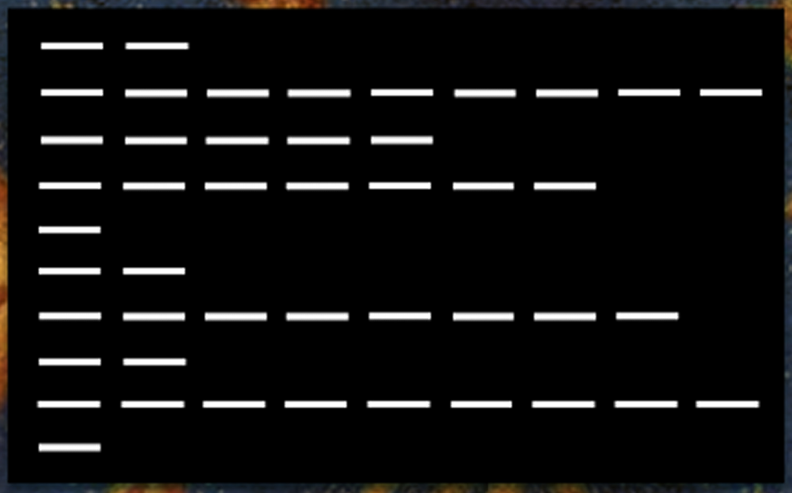

POST THE ANSWER IN THE CODEX ON THE HIGH FIVE FRIENDS YOUTUBE CHANNEL

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Get everything you need to spread that delicious cheer with SOLCORP brand gifts! We have a large assortment of ideal products from classic trauma series t-shirts to our face mask air filters and drinking receptacles!

(our air filters and drinking receptacles no longer contain highly hallucinogenic materials)

We also have a variety of other (slightly) questionable products available!

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https://gpreeds-official-merch.creator-spring.com/

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WORLD OF BLOCKS

All boys born in the late 90s to early 2000s share at least one similar brain cell, and it is constantly emburdened with thinking about “Bionicle” lore.

In its darkest hour (approximately 1999), “LEGO” was in dire straits. Even after buying toy licensing rights to “Star Wars” and phasing out their strictly original physical toy sets and video games, “LEGO” bled market share to a small indie gem called “Pokémon.” Maybe you’ve heard of it? So they decided to launch their own narrative universe, in order to sell truly unique toys.

The resulting effort became “Bionicle" as we first knew it. The mystical universe that teetered on offensive co-opting of the Māori language captivated a young and tween audience through a wide net of video games, comic books, extensive novels, and of course, the physical toy line itself.

To me, what made Bionicle great was that, although it was a transmedia story being told, I could jump in at any point, read any book, play any game, and feel a broader message being told. No matter how young the audience was, it felt as if “LEGO” was treating us as a mature demographic. And as a kid, that’s a sudden rush of blood to the head more potent than a snow day: to be treated like an adult.

Some select plot lines and worldbuilding aspects even grow with us and take on new meanings. Take for instance the concept that the earth for the Bionicles (Metro Nui) is a living, breathing organism, and plot lines explore how antagonistic forces are killing the planet (where were the right-wingers bitching about Woke Bionicle?), and that makes for a more potent, inspired story.

And if you could think of an aspect of Matoran life, it’s probably been thought of, and expounded upon in a comic, video game, or novel. There’s a Bionicle alphabet for god’s sake. There is a decryptor for it on DCode. Do with this information what you will.

In doing research for the article, mainly delving into old gameplays of “Bionicle: Heroes” and a nine hour complete retelling of the whole “Bionicle” story (shoutout DuckBricks, you legend), I realized that this universe was not only cool as shit, but it almost serves as an anthology setting.

In no particular order, “Bionicle” runs the narrative gambit of: multiversal adventures, brooding revenge plots, ancient beings (with powers to rival gods) being cast down, and an ancient Eldritch being that makes Matoran go mad at the sight of it.

The main narrative, through lines that connect all of these stories, is one of belief and self transformation. The allegory of Matoran turning into Toa mirrors any story of a hero. It almost feels like the process of alchemy: taking a metal or material thought to be worthless, and transmuting it to something of wonder.

“Bionicle” runs the narrative gambit of: multiversal adventures, brooding revenge plots, ancient beings”

It's this transitionary message that I gleaned that managed to save me in one of my darkest hours.
In 2007 I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, one day before my mom's birthday. During diagnosis, I shared a room with a guy named Cody. My mom brought my PS2 to our room after a couple days. And the one game I asked her to bring? "Bionicle: Heroes."
Even without remembering every single narrative decision made in the universe, I remembered the immersion I felt in that admittedly sub-par game. The narrative was rich enough for me to fall into, and forget for a little while that life as I knew it was changed irrevocably.
I started to cling to an important part of the "Bionicle" mythos: that embracing what makes you different will lead you to the best version of yourself. Of course, as a dumbass kid, I couldn't grasp the complexity of what this meant to me past 'Toa are awesome warriors, Jaller is literally me.'
A week went by in the hospital. I started becoming accustomed to my new life: the realization that I will have to take on the slack of an internal organ that serves no use anymore. That I will have to be mindful of what goes into my body, and what my body tells me in the given moment. For better or worse, I began coping with the fact I would be shackled to this for the rest of my life.
I also started reassessing my positions.

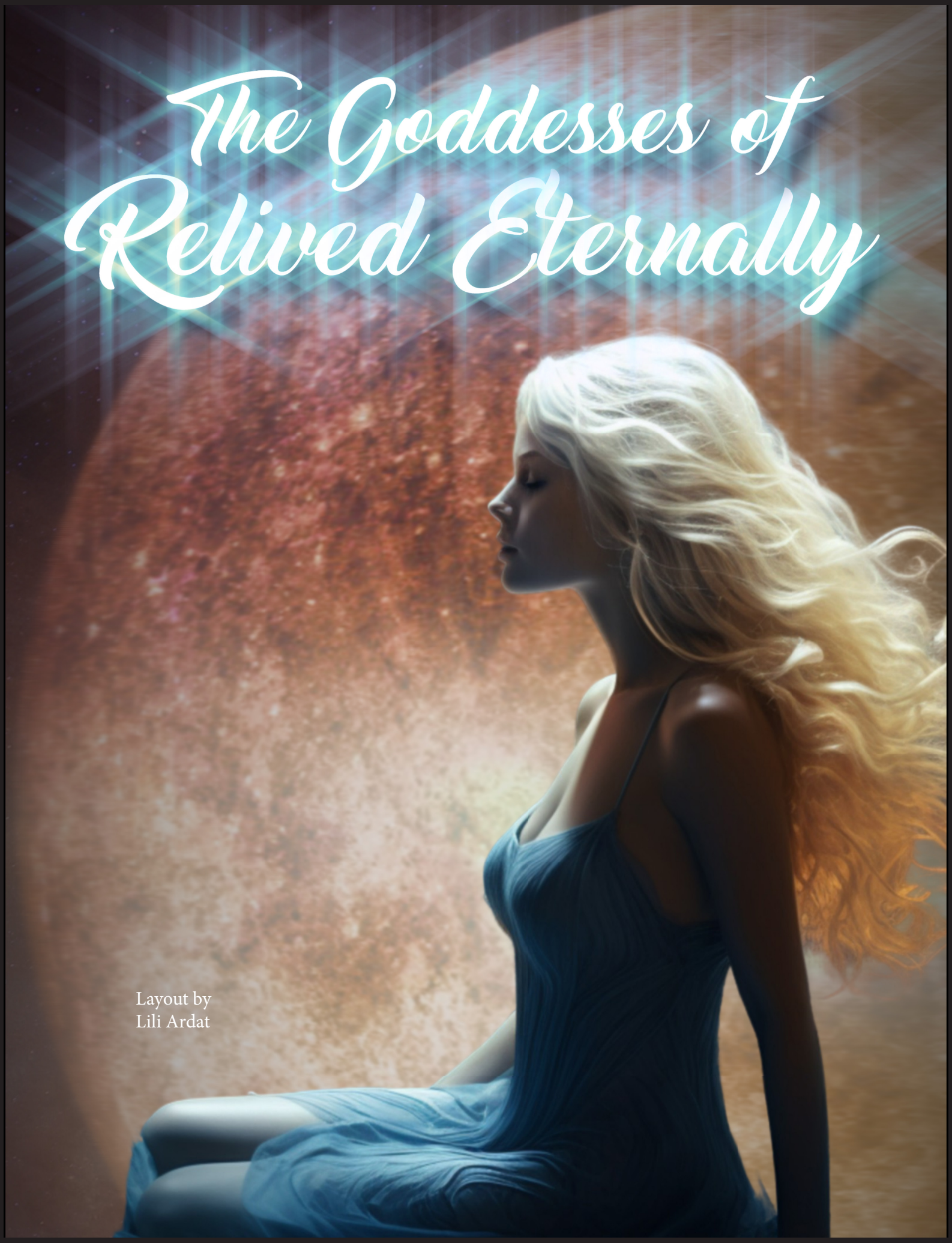
"I began coping with the fact I would be shackled to this for the rest of my life."

I've met lots of people who have been impacted by this disease. I've met children as young as three years old, recently diagnosed just a month prior. The realization that she lugged her backpack around everywhere, not because it was school time, but because her diabetes supplies were in it both wrecked me emotionally and brought me a certain type of joy when I rolled up my sleeve to reveal my continuous glucose monitor, to her excitement.
From the little I remember about Cody, my "Bionicle" bromance partner, he was a decent bit older than me. In his later teens, at the very least. Over the years, a certain type of empathy emerged in those who were diagnosed later into their lives rather than childhood; For them, they had to unlearn habits of eating, without having to do simple math for carbohydrates. To me, having it as a child meant I knew nothing else of my life prior. I only knew life after my affliction made itself known.

Type 1 diabetes is a chaotic ocean beating against the sands of the patient's sanity. One that seems to never relent in times of absolute despair, while inexplicably becoming calm and tranquil the next day. I've done a lot of bargaining with what I believe to be a higher power. And unknowingly, a piece of media I thought held no significance turned out to influence my entire view of the disease:
Given the choice, would I cast this off onto someone else? Absolutely not. For all of the ups and downs it gives me, it enables me to attempt to remain steadfast at the rising tide. Hoping my stories help to inspire those who share the same struggles as me. After all, if you had the chance, wouldn't you choose to be a Toa rather than a Matoran? To divine a higher purpose for yourself?

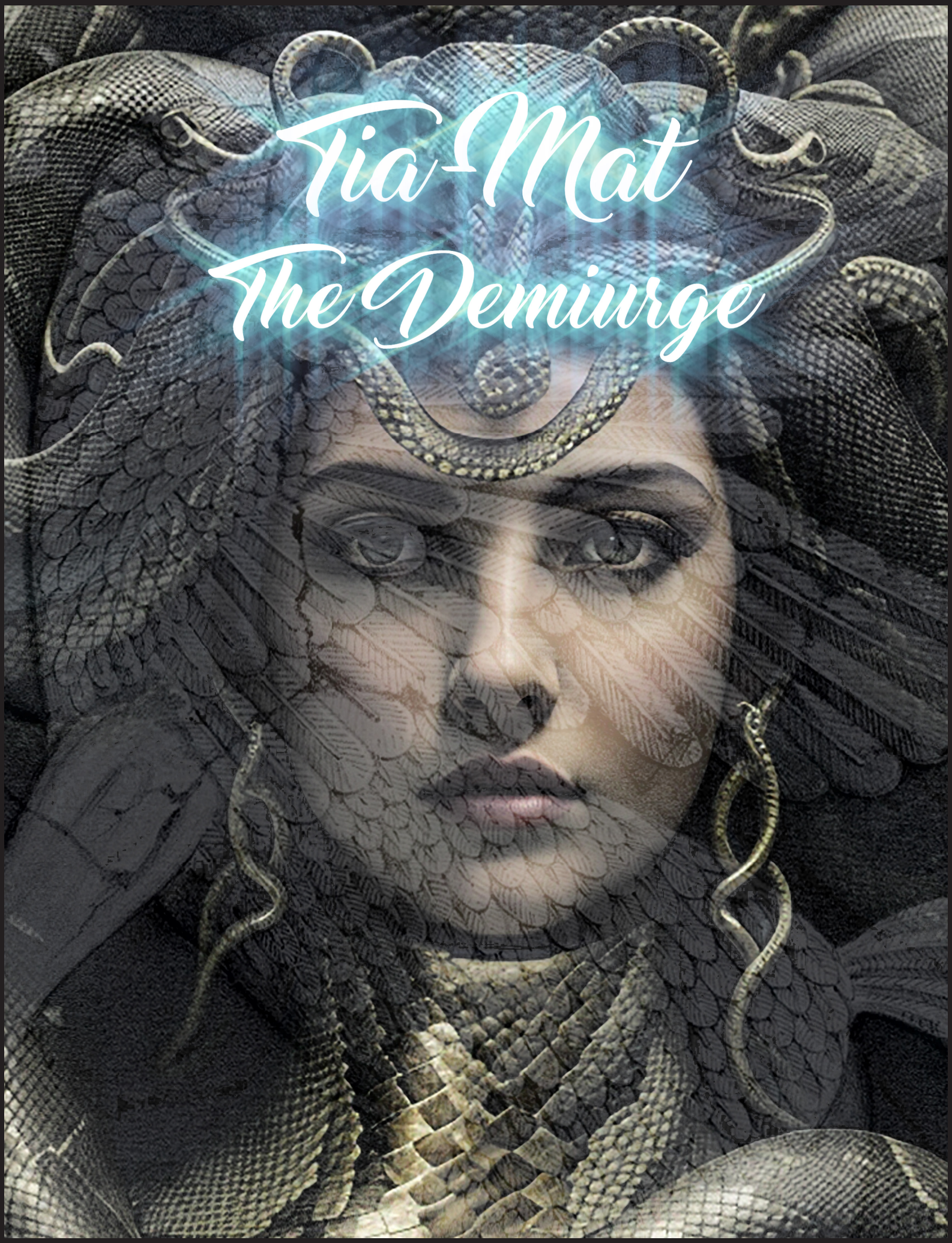
Article by
Aaron Albright
@supremeyeetjpeg

The Goddesses of Relived Eternally



Layout by
Lili Ardat

Inari Okami
Kami of Foxes, Fertility and Wealth


Tia-Mat
The Demiurge

Saraswati
Goddess of Wisdom,
Learning and Art

~Answers from last issue~

Puzzle 1: RELA Part 3: Tri-Re-La

The RE contains the answer.

The letters of the LA indicate the placement. Count them to find the word to use.

Tri means take the third letter backwards of the word used.

The RE also indicates that you move backwards

Final answer: We Are Waves

Puzzle 2: Scrambled Eggs In The Morning

Unscramble the letters below into these three words:

N R I U P R A E I T H S M A S

Final answer: Are Spirits Human?

Layout by
G.P Reeds

~Puzzles~

Puzzle 1: Symbolic In Nature

(HINT: SCY)

Final answer: _____

Puzzle 2: What Is A Picture Worth?

+pro

-f

+s

+in +te

Final answer: _____

Want to submit a promo?

Here is some information on how.

Promotions can be either half a page or one page, with a maximum of a two page allowance. (there may be exceptions to this)
Promos are free to submit, but there is an option to commission a promo to be made. It costs $5 USD for half a page and $10 USD for one full page, with a maximum allowance of 2 pages (there may be exceptions to this).

The required dimensions are **8.625 inches in width and 11.25 inches in height**, with a printing resolution of **300-400 dpi** and pixels set at 3450 x 4500. You can email the graphic artist at **austererr@gmail.com**. Please upload the image on Google Drive.

Magazines are released bi-monthly. If you miss the submission date, your advertisement will be placed in the following magazine. In some cases, promos may be rejected, but you will be given a reason.

Promos do not have to be ARG exclusively; they can be **any indie media**. The ARG community is a mixed medium, and I welcome all creators to submit promos for their projects.
On the following page, I provide an example of where to place text in your promo. If you go outside the guide, **your promo will be resized and given a border.**

Keep Text in here

Please ensure that words are not at the edges or extending past this yellow area. Try to keep the lettering centered.

credits

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Co-creator, lead writer, interviewer
Twitter: @GPReeds

Check out his youtube channel!

https://www.youtube.com/@GPReeds

Co-creator/founder
Graphic artist, magazine layout/construction
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https://https://www.buymeacoffee.com/UwU.Austere

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ARG DISCORDS

You can follow your favorite ARG games on these discord servers

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Reeders Corner

Check out G.P. Reed's Discord server for more ARG and other indie series news.

Non-profit magazine developed by ARG creators to spread the genre and promote artists and their projects.